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SUBJECT: ELECTION COMMISSION ANNOUNCES NEXT STEPS REGARDING VOTER LIST

**¶1.** Summary. Nearly three weeks after the Supreme Court announced its nullification of the "fresh" voter list, and a week after receiving the formal court order, the Election Commission (EC) finally met on June 12 to discuss implementation of the decision. The steps announced by the EC include several controversial measures that have provoked a fresh wave of criticism. With the opposition demanding changes in the composition of the EC as a requirement to participate in the coming parliamentary elections, the controversy is unlikely to end soon.

**¶2.** On June 12 the EC met to discuss next steps after having received the certified Supreme Court verdict last week which declared the new voter list illegal. At the meeting, the EC decided on the following steps:

- As per the Supreme Court decision, the EC will scrap the new voters list it started in January and use the 2000 voters list as a starting point.
- The EC will not conduct a new door-to-door enumeration. First-time voters will be required to visit a local election commission office to register.
- The EC will launch a public information campaign to raise awareness among voters on how to register or file claims and objections.
- The EC may opt to use some of the information gathered during the recent controversial voter enumeration process with the new voter list.
- From July 1 to July 31 field-level election officials will begin the process of preparing a supplemental list that will include new voters and make note of disqualified voters from the 2000 list.
- If a citizen has a claim or objection, s/he can visit a district election office or assistant registration office to obtain the proper forms for corrections, additions or deletions.
- The EC did not provide a timeframe for when the final supplementary voter list would be published.

**¶3.** According to the EC's statement, this will be the first election since 1991 in which the onus of registration for first-time voters shifts from the EC to the individual voter. In all prior elections, and in the process of preparing the controversial "fresh" list that the Supreme Court invalidated, the EC hired enumerators to conduct a door-to-door registration campaign.

¶4. The EC also stated that it would not publish a draft list, but instead would only publish a supplementary list indicating changes since 2000. This means that on Election Day poll workers will have to review two lists -- the 2000 list and the updated supplementary list.

Comment

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¶5. Several of the EC's decisions on implementing the Supreme Court decision are controversial and could prove onerous to execute. Shifting the responsibility to register new voters from the EC to the voters, changing more than 15 years of precedent, will require the type of sustained public information campaign that the EC has been noticeably incapable of organizing to date. In addition, the decision to prepare a large supplementary list to reflect additions, deletions and corrections to the 2000 list could prove a major source of confusion and delay in the polling stations on Election Day.

¶6. The appointment of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) M.A. Aziz has been contentious from the beginning, and these steps will not assuage his critics. With the recent Awami League-led "siege of Dhaka" aimed at ousting the CEC, it would appear that any decisions taken by the EC at this point -- no matter how credible -- will be highly scrutinized and viewed with mistrust. The opposition has declared that they will not accept any list prepared under the current EC administration. If a compromise cannot be reached, the integrity of the election process will continue to suffer.

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